What is the Difference between the Body's Inside and Its Outside?

著者	ELKINS James
journal or publication title	『身体観』と身体感の歴史
volume	15
page range	9-16
year	2001-03-30
URL	http://doi.org/10.15055/00003045

What is the Difference between the Body's Inside and Its Outside?

James ELKINS

Art Institute of Chicago

Few pictures of the living, conscious body open the skin and reveal what is inside.

There are the medical videos of tiny cameras crawling along passages deep in the body, photographs of operations done with local anesthetic, and news footage of people stunned by explosions, looking down at their torn bodies.

There are also faked wounds, from the movie *Night of the Living Dead* to the movie *Dead Ringers*, from the artist Hermann Nitsch's ritual performances to Philippine "psychic healing" operations done without surgical instruments.

These examples are not only marginal because they are unpleasant or painful to watch, but because the inside of the body is a powerful symbol of death. In the medieval English epic poem *Beowulf*, bodies are called "houses of the spirit," and any cut can be a "wound door" (*bengeat*) that allows the spirit to escape.

It is normally impolite even to look at the places where the inside of the body becomes visible-the twilight of nostrils, ears, mouths, anuses, vaginas, and urethras. The inside is by definition and by nature that which is not seen. The inside is also, by definition, that which is painful or unpleasant, as opposed to the outside, which is and smooth. The inside is liquid, the outside is dry. The inside is disgusting, the outside is beautiful. The outside is public, the inside is private; the outside is life itself, and the inside is death.

What I want to do today is argue a little against that dichotomy.

There is a long tradition in western representation of ambiguous relations between inside and outside, and it has culminated in the 20th c.--in fact the most important achievement of 20th c. figural representation may be the mixing of inside and outside. It's a long story, and so I am going to start a long time ago: in fact 4,500 years before the present.

The early Babylonian demon Humbaba is a spectacular counterexample: he had a face made out of his own intestines. In the ancient Middle Eastern epic poem *Gilgamesh*, Humbaba appears as the "Guardian of the Cedar Forest," a terrifying monster who challenges the heroes Gilgamesh and Enkidu.

When they meet Humbaba screams out an imprecation that is only partly legible in the surviving versions of the poem:

"Gilgamesh, throat and neck, / I would feed your flesh to the screaming vul-

ture."

But Humbaba's awesome face is oddly hidden from our view because there is a lacuna in the text just when the heroes get their first look at him. Gilgamesh stares, and whispers to his friend Enkidu,

"My friend, Humbaba's face keeps changing!"

The line might also mean:

"Humbaba's face looks strange" or "different," but the image of boiling intestines is clearly legible.

At this point two more lines are missing, so that Humbaba's face, as a modern editor puts it, is "lost in a break."

How does one kill a monster who wears his insides on the outside?

Gilgamesh slays him by turning him once again inside out: he says "they pulled out his insides including his tongue."

But how could that have been done? What was *inside* Humbaba when his intestines were already outside?

This is all we know of the battle in *Gilgamesh*, and ancient images do not add much more. It is possible that Humbaba was wearing a tegument of intestines, the way that the Aztec god Xipe Totec, "Our Lord of the Flayed One," wore human hides.

Perhaps Gilgamesh did not recognize Humbaba's inversion, and killed him the ordinary way, by evisceration: but it may also be that Humbaba already was eviscerated, and could only be killed by being returned to his normal state. I would rather read the story that way, since it provides a myth to help understand the inside and the outside. Before Humbaba, the myth might say, it was still possible to wear intestines on the outside. In Humbaba's time, the intestines might come out of the body and swarm over its surface. After Humbaba, a normal person will die if his intestines are exposed, and a monstrous person will die if his intestines are hidden. For Humbaba evisceration was life, and death was a paradoxical, fatal restoration of the insides to their proper place.

In my reading, the story is about the importance of keeping the insides where they belong. Humbaba was mixed up: he mixed up his insides and his outsides.

*

It may seem that Humbaba is one-of-a-kind monster, but his descendents are still around. He was the ancestor of the archaic Greek Gorgon, from whose

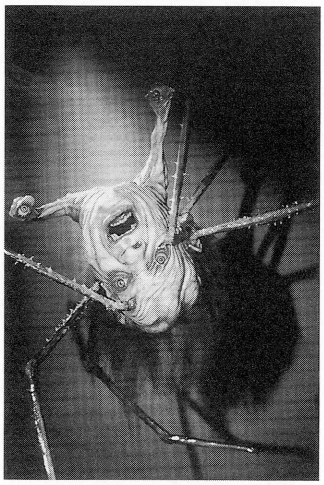

Plate 1

face we have the Medusa and ultimately our stagy science-fiction monsters like the movie *The Blob* and John Carpenter's movie *The Thing* (plate 1). The Thing is a monster camouflages itself as a peson. When danger threatens, it spills out of the person, using the person's body as raw material for a new body.

In one scene, the monster emerges from a dog by inverting it, Humbaba-fashion. Then, to defend itself, it sprouts insectlike appendages. For the moment, it suits the monster to use the dog's face, but in the next few scenes, it grows large arms and pulls itself up into the rafters.

Carpenter's film is among the most extreme and inventive fantasies on bodily metamorphosis in the history motion pictures. There is a moment, just before the monster is apparently killed, when it is nothing but a lump of sodden viscera, as if it were resting from its many transformations. But it senses its attackers, and pops out eyes to see them better. It asseses the danger it is in, and at the last moment eviscerates itself, projecting a lamprey-like mouth.

In *The Thing*, bodies move at the speed of thought: whatever the Thing needs, it can grow in the span of a second or less.

The Thing owes its more purely visceral moments to movies like The Blob, which in turn derives from a British film of the 1950's, *The Creeping Unknown*, which is a story about a formless mass that coalesces from the melting remains of an astronaut. The movie was created in consultation with the British painter Graham Sutherland, who had been experimenting with Crucifixions where carcasses and abstract heaps of organs and bones are draped over the cross and studded with thorns and nails. Like Francis Bacon, Graham Sutherland had gotten the idea largely from Picasso, who had toyed with the idea of a Crucifixion of bones and tattered flesh in a series of paintings and drawings done in the late fall of 1932.

In this way the inverted bodies of *The Thing* have their antecedents in British and Spanish painting of the mid-century, and before them in the Greek Gorgon and finally in Humbaba, the eviscerated monster. (Let me just repeat this genealogy, because it stretches over 4,500 years: Humbaba--Gorgon--Medusa--Picasso--Sutherland--*The Blob*--*The Thing*.)

Freud popularized the psychoanalyst Ferenczi's interpretation of the Gorgon as a symbol of the female genitalia, supposedly the most horrifying thing that can be seen. But the Freud-Ferenczi reading is only one of many possible meanings of Humbaba's body.

Humbaba must have been a difficult body to comprehend (as Gilgamesh said, it kept changing). What did Humbaba's genitals look like? Was his penis an invagination? Was his anus a snaking penis? Humbaba's total, encompassing, changing inversion and evisceration is the worst of the catastrophes that can overtake the body.

*

As I've saifd, the body's insides often symbolize death. When a body is opened accidentally, we do everything possible to keep it closed. But notice that the cure for opened insides involes tying together the inside and the outside.

The history of bandages involves sutures, knots, staples, pins, bolts, clamps, and other devices, all intended to make an airtight closure. Older suturing methods include the use of skin substitutes (leather patches, parchment), tied in place with animal cords (cat gut, horse hair, silk), secured with animal paste (fish glue, bone size). A wound in such cases is a deficit of skin: hence the cure was an excess of skin.

In non-Western cultures and in early Europe, the skin of an animal that had caused a wound was sometimes required to heal the wound. The Irish writer Tomás O'Crohan describes how his leg was saved after it had been bitten by a seal: his friends killed another seal, and "stuck a lump of the seal's flesh tight" into the gap in his leg-literally sculpting his calf into shape with animal meat.

Suturing has found new resonance in fiber arts, where it has become entangled with the histories of sewing, crocheting, and weaving. The confluence of torturous devices to mend the body and "feminine" closures in clothes and fabrics makes an interesting field of possibilities, and contemporary art often plays the themes of domesticity and pain against one another, as in works by Annette Messager. Her fabrics and stitched pieces are overtly domestic, but so are her hanging collections of photographs of body parts, which are reminiscent of walls hung with arrangements of family photographs. Some, like this one, are in body-like clumps, and the strings that hold them up are like sutures as much as stitching.

In all the images I have mentioned so far, the body's inside and its outside are blurred or confused. (In stitching, the body's insides are literally tied to the outsides.) It is possible to go even further, and argue that there is no essential difference, in visual representation, between the body's outside and its inside.

*

Specifically, it is possible to argue that flesh is a fluid, and that skin is a film or scum covering the fluid.

According to the linguist Carl Buck, Russian, Lithuanian, and Lettish (Latvian) words for "flesh" all derive "from the notion of a filmy, 'floating' covering." They are related to the Sanskrit prefix *pluta-*, meaning "floating," and ultimately to the Indo-European root **pleu-*, denoting "flow" or "float." In those languages, as in Indo-European, flesh is something that floats, a liquid rather than a solid like the bones. The skin is like a scum congealed on the body's surface, and the muscles are like curds, sunk in its depths.

Greek terms for the body also partake of these liquid metaphors: Greek *thu-*

mos can mean "spirit" or "anger," but it can also be a liquid that "boils and swells in the innards." This way of imagining the body as a congealed jelly, part fluid and part solid, has its echoes in eighteenth century experimental medicine.

The eighteenth-century anatomist and surgeon Albrecht von Haller was struck by the profusion of "net-like" membranes in the body: some hard and thick, others "pervaded by a flux of some juice or liquors," or formed in the shape of tunics or coats, cylinders, or cones. According to Haller these watery or oily "web-like substances" are one of two kinds of tissues in the body; the other is "a mere glue" between that lubricates them.

But on closer inspection, he says, it proves difficult to tell the "mere glue" from the membranous fibers. Cartilage, for example, appears to be "scarce any thing else than this glue concreted," and in the end "even the filamentary fibres are all first formed of such a transfused glue." Bones are constructed from a "compacted gluten," a fact demonstrated by diseases in which "the hardest bones, by a liquefaction of their gluten, return into cartilages, flesh, and jelly," and the opposite happens when the muscles age and dissolve into "mere jelly," or when bones, skin, and tendons are boiled down to make size (animal glue). The development from fetus to adult is a transformation of fetal "jelly" into the inextricable colloid of membrane and glue, which dissolves again in old age. Seen this way, the body's membranes are nothing but a temporary state, a flux of jellies.

Haller says "all parts of the body, from the softest to the hardest," only differ in the "number of earthy particles" and "aqueous glue."

I would like to take this as a way of thinking about flesh that refuses the distinction between skin and viscera, inside and outside, hard and soft, in favor of jellies, oils, "albuminous water," and viscous matter.

This perspective is especially apposite to the visual arts, since there is an affinity between the slurry of fluids in a surgical operation-the saline wash, blood, and cut tissues-and the mix of pigments and oils in a painting.

Artists who have tried to depict the body's insides have often drawn parallels between the body's thickened liquids and the sticky media of oil painting; among the painters that come to mind are Francis Bacon, the later Ivan Albright, and the early Kokoschka.

For Kokoschka the paper or canvas surface is already a skin, and he scratches, gouges, and tattoos his figures and backgrounds. In 1909 and 1910 his painted or drawn skin sometimes became translucent, revealing vessels underneath, just as it is possible in life to see the network of capillaries by using color infrared film, or discern superficial arteries through light-colored skin.

Kokoschka describes his vessels as nerves, and one of his biographers thought of *écorchés*, but they are not anatomically specific; unlike real arteries, nerves, or

lymph vessels, Kokoschka's painted "nerves" are spiky branched things that do not lead anywhere.

Their bunching makes them more like varicose veins or cleavages in rock. Around the time of *Murderer, Hope of Women* (where a figure is flayed, revealing the same "nerves"), Kokoschka's paintings show an intense preoccupation with skin, in scratching it away, tearing it off, or seeing through it. Portraits such as the *Boy with a Raised Hand* are scraped and abraded, as if seeing itself had to become so violent that it could gouge and rasp at the flesh.

I have no simple explanation for his strange fascination (I doubt it is related to his thoughts about tensions between the sexes, or to his poverty). Something about the skin seemed wrong to him, and for a while when he was young he invented bodies that are both torn and not torn, or ripped but miraculously alive and whole. Kokoschka worked with a deep and broad awareness of history, and many currents mingle in his work on subcutaneous forms, translucent skin, and themes of flaying or ripping.

His preoccupation with innervation can be traced back to the eighteenth century interest in the nervous system and the sense of touch, as it is exemplified for instance in Piranesi's "flayed" ruins, where the architectural forms become metaphors for the opened body. Many of Piranesi's plates are large (one is literally the size of a person's body), and the buildings they represent are irresistably reminiscent of skulls, arms, and torsos-or of the body's more abstract "architecture": its scaffolding, its insulation, its waterproof covering, its often decayed interior.

Another source for the awareness of skin's translucence is the seventeenth-century painters' discovery that fingers glow when they are held close to a candle flame. Although the more familiar examples of this come from Georges La Tour and Michael Sweerts, Adam Elsheimer is responsible for the strangest image-a scene from the Roman poet Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in which Hecate, who is mortified when a young boy laughs at her, prepares to transform him into a lizard.

In Elsheimer's version the body is already glowing with the heat of metamorphosis, as his bones begin to liquefy into amphibian softness. In the poem the *Metamorphoses* the boy, Stellio, becomes a lizard; in Elsheimer's picture he is on his way-he's a wavering, lacertine mixture of a human, a softened candle, and a salamander.

In the nineteenth century the incandescent flesh of Dutch scenes of sensualism became one of Ingres's broadening range of historical allusions. Ingres's melted-wax fingers, which the historian Robert Rosenblum noted as his special obsession, owe something to the candent fingers and tapers in Michiel Sweerts and Georges de la Tour, and before them to the entire tradition of translucent bodies that began with Caravaggio and Elsheimer.

In our century there have been various attempts to show the body's fluids, and the cuts that make them accessible. Sally Mann's photographs explore the fluids and bodies of children; Kiki Smith juxtaposes photos of the skin with pools of blood; Andres Serrano's work involves both the fluids themselves (including urine and blood) and their appearance on the body's cut surface (in his series of morgue photographs).

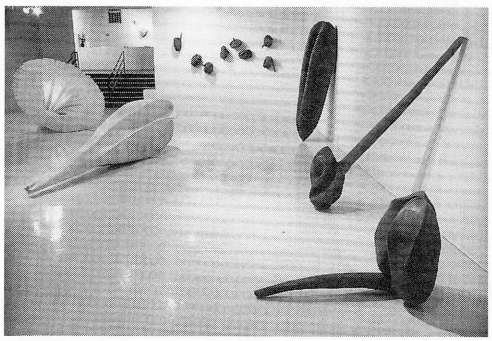

Plate 2

Joan Livingstone's sculptures and prints are replete with body references, and carefully distanced from any literal representation (plate 2). She uses organ- and tissue-like media (felt, strengthened by resins) and works with the body's textures, weights, and colors rather than with its literal components. Looking at a work like her installation called *Resistances*, a viewer might well think of dangling breasts, hanging testicles, or full stomachs-but the thought would be softened by the degree of abstraction.

There is medieval metaphor for the human condition: the body, they said, is like a sack of flesh, which rots and finally has to be discarded. Livingstone's work shows that the medieval (or perhaps specifically Christian) indifference to the distinction between the body's clean, dry, beautiful outsides and its seething insides is very much of interest to the contemporary art world.

*

Arguably Francis Bacon has been most successful in thinking his way toward a kind of fluid body that is at once inside and outside, where there is no longer any sense to the inside/outside dichotomy.

"There is this great beauty of the color of meat," he reminds his interviewer, David Sylvester. Bacon's early paintings are only about cutting, or slaughterhouses, and they display vast monstrous carcasses, strings of vertebrae that could only come from dinosaurs, and Popes whose mouths are bloodied as if they had been assaulted.

After the 1960's, however, Bacon achieved a synthesis of inside and outside, surface and viscera, which is unique in the history of art. One might say to begin that Bacon's later paintings still have a notion of skin, though it is not a *surface* anymore, but a sense of translucence.

The historical antecedents of Bacon's disheveled bodies are the Renaissance Venetian experiments with the softness and *depth* of the skin, especially some paintings by Titian where the body's imperfect opacity is represented by translucent layers of paint.

Titian's glazes-some of them rubbed until they are almost invisible-remind a viewer of the process of painting, which builds from the bony white gesso through thickening layers to a final paper-thin membrane.

Such paintings make body into a sequence of oiled sheets. In the late paintings, the delicate veils of flesh are also cut by sharp dry impasto, so that the body becomes a mix of hard and soft, very much as it is in Bacon.

It remained for Bacon to anatomize the body, and to display the process of painting as an anatomic metaphor. He confuses the body's layers, just as the patiently built layers of Venetian oil painting were tumbled together in the thick, impetuous *alla prima* painting that began in the mid-nineteenth century.

The faces appear to be several inches thick, as if they are built of painterly marks and smears, and we are invited to see through to... to what? A concoction of floating veils, oily smears, sodden cloths, greasy spills, damp papers laid one on top of another.

(The canvas sometimes looks printed, as if Bacon had rubber-stamped and blotted it, and other passages look sharp, like pieces of splintered bone drifting among loosened tissues.)

When the flesh is deep, it may be a warm pool of slurred organs, and those organs seem to *include* scraps of skin, so that the face is effectively left without any covering. Here the face is mixed with itself: his body's armor has retreated into his body, and mingled with it.

Bacon's best images are awash in all the body's parts, private and public, human and mechanical, nameless pieces of anatomy and painful pieces of flesh, autonomous organs and dead bones.

*

That's the argument I wanted to present today. Of course it is a counter-intuitive argument.

The vast majority of the history of pictured and sculpted bodies has to do with skin, and virtually all representations of the body insist on an unbridgeable gulf between inside and outside.

It can even be argued that much of Western philosophy is built on the idea that inside and outside are essentially different-though that is a subject for another conference.

But I think that if we are going to understand twentieth-century painting, photography, and medical imaging, we need a way of writing about the body that breaks down the old dichotomy between inside and outside. The genealogy I have started to trace here-from Haller through *The Thing*–goes a long way toward interpreting contemporary artistic and scientific representations of the body. The inside *is* the outside: that's my moral for this afternoon.